

Soule

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S E R M O N,

ON THE DEATH OF

Miss OLIVE SOULE,

DAUGHTER OF

Mr. ASAPH SOULE,

OF PLYMPTON,

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE,

JANUARY 30th, 1795,

IN THE 19TH YEAR OF HER AGE.

BY *EZRA SAMPSON,*
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN PLYMPTON.

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—1797.—



THE following DISCOURSE,
*being very short, and hastily composed, was
delivered immediately after the Funeral of
OLIVE SOULE, Feb. 1st, 1795; and
is copied at the earnest request of her near
relations—to whom it is inscribed, by their
sincere well wisher,*

Sara Sampson.



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S E R M O N.

ISAIAH xl. 6th and part of the 7th verse.

The voice said cry ; and he said, What shall I cry ? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field : the grass withereth, the flower fadeth.

THE frailty of man has been a general theme of conversation, ever since death entered into the world. Numerous discourses have been delivered, and numerous volumes written on this subject : and indeed, no subject can engage the human mind that is more solemn and interesting, than that of man's mortality ; and no where is it painted in so lively and affecting colours as in the holy Scriptures. Life is there compared to a vapor, which just appeareth and then vanisheth away -- to a post who rides with speed, in order to carry important intelligence : to a ship, that with
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sails, flies before the wind : to the flight of an eagle, the swiftest of birds : to grass ; which is only of a short Summer's growth, and which to day flourishes, and tomorrow withers and dies ; and to a flower, which even the very hour that it is blooming, fades, droops, and is gone.--- The last mentioned similitudes, representing the shortness and uncertainty of life, we have in the text.

THE voice said cry--and it was the voice of God.--A solemn voice which is often heard in the divine Providence, as well as in the divine word.-- *The voice said cry* ; intimating that something of great weight and importance was to be published aloud, that all might hear. And the enquiry being made, *What shall I cry ?* It was answered, *all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field : the grass withereth, the flower fadeth.* Grass we know is but of short duration. It grows and flourisheth but a little while, before it fadeth and withereth away : and oft, while it is yet moist with the morning dew, it falls beneath the mower's scythe. And still more transient is the flower of the garden, and especially of the field ; scarcely does it bloom before it begins to fade : the foot may crush it, the grazing beast may crop it, or a secret worm at the root, or a chilling frost, may suddenly destroy its fragrance, and wither all its beauties. And such for frailty is man : he is like withering grass ; like the fading flower of the field : and this holds true of man, when in his best state. In his best state, as the
Scripture

Scripture, saith, *he is altogether vanity.* The young and healthy, the blooming and gay, are frail as grass, which to day is, and tomorrow is consumed: frail as the flower, which no sooner cometh forth, but it begins to vanish. No one is exempt from the laws of mortality. Neither youth, nor beauty, nor strength, nor virtue itself, nor any advantages or accomplishments whatever, can insure the life of the possessor. The text speaketh of human frailty in the most universal terms, including the whole of mankind, of every age and condition: *ALL flesh, it saith, is grass, and ALL the goodliness thereof, as the flower of the field.* This is the language of inspiration. It is the voice of Providence: it is echoed to us from death beds, and in dying groans; and we have this day had an affecting comment on the text. We have just been committing to the grave one who died in the bloom of her age, who was cut down like the tender grass, like the flower of the field. I attended her death bed: and while witnessing the last agonies of this dying youth, I said in my heart, surely *All flesh is grass*; and methought the voice, even the voice of my God, bid me cry, especially to the youth of this place, and once more to tell them, that their life is frail as the grass, frail as the flower of the field. And since man is thus mortal, as we have now heard and seen: since human life, in its most promising state, is thus frail and uncertain, let this consideration convey to us those lessons of instruction, which we are infinitely concerned to receive and practice.

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AND, *firstly*, let us acquiesce in the law of mortality, and in the divine disposals respecting all the changes that take place in the world.--- Behold! as the clay is in the hands of the potter, so are we in the hands of God.--By sin, death entered into the world; and it is appointed unto all men once to die. And in this appointment the Judge of all the earth, we are assured, hath done right. Be still, and know that He is God. Indeed, we cannot by searching find Him out. His ways are in the deep, and His footsteps are not known. The ways of providence are often mysterious and incomprehensible. We cannot search out the particular reasons why sickness and death are sent into one family, whilst the voice of health is heard in others: Why one is taken out of the world, and another left: Why some die in youth, and others are spared to old age.---These are things for which our scanty minds cannot assign particular causes. But it is enough that the Lord reigneth. A Being of perfect rectitude, and of infinite wisdom and goodness, governeth the world. A sparrow falleth not to the ground without Him, and the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. Such is His wisdom, that He cannot err: such is His power, that He cannot be resisted: and such is His goodness, that He cannot wrong or injure one individual creature in the universe. Therefore, in the final issue of things, every mysterious event will be cleared up, and it will plainly be seen, that as for God, His way is perfect; and that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of
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His throne, even whilst clouds and darkness are round about Him. This consideration and view of things, has, in all ages of the world, quieted the minds of good people, even under the greatest trials. When Job had all his children cut off in an instant, he saw the hand of God and was quiet. *The Lord gave, he said, and the Lord hath taken away : blessed be the name of the Lord.* When Eli lost his sons, he calmly replied, *It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good.* When the Shunamitish woman, in the anguish of her heart, at the death of her only child, went forth to meet the prophet Elisha, he enquired of her saying, *Is it well with thee ? Is it well with the child ?* And she answered, *It is well.* Though her heart yearned toward her son, and was, as it were, bleeding with sorrow at the affliction of his death, she had such a view of and acquiescence in divine Providence, that she said, *It is well.* And also the Prophet Habakkuk piously resolved, though he should be stript of all outward comforts, *to rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation.* It is the purpose of the sanctified mind, to trust in God, and rejoice in His reign, and delight in Him as its portion, come what will. Let such a trust and complacency in the Divine Being, be your staff to lean upon in every trial of life ; and neither despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when rebuked of Him. Hear the rod, and learn righteousness, and turn to Him that smiteth you ; for *Blessed are they whom the Lord chasteneth, and instructeth out of his Law.*

Secondly.

Secondly. SINCE life is so frail, and we have no continuing city here, let the thought be improved to wean us from the world. Why should we set our hearts upon that which is not? This is not our rest: it is not our home. There is no earthly comforts, which we may promise ourselves that we shall enjoy tomorrow. *Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.* Set not your affections principally on things below: the time is short, the grass withereth, the flower of life fadeth. Let those then who have husbands, wives, children, brothers, and sisters, be as if they had none: for soon these endearing connections will be dissolved. And let those who weep, be as if they wept not, and those who rejoice, as if they rejoiced not: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

Thirdly. SINCE the life of man is frail, like the grass and the flower of the field, let us always live mindful of our mortal state. Let us not say in our hearts, *Our mountain stands strong, and we shall not be moved.* Let us consider, that vanity is written on all things under the Sun: and that our best earthly enjoyments may vanish at a moment, when we feel the most secure of them. When we look upon our children, however healthy and likely to live they may seem, let us remember, that they may soon and suddenly be taken from us by death. While providing for our own bodies, and feeding and cloathing them, let us consider, that we shall have this to do but a short time: that death is working in us, and the grave is our home. Wise
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and proper for mortal man, was this resolve of Job; *I will say to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister.*

It is good that such dying creatures should have death in mind, and frequently bring it near by serious meditation. Hence that pathetic wish of God himself, *O that they were wise, that they understood this; that they would consider their latter end!* And I would particularly commend this solemn exhortation to the youth of this assembly. While you are rejoicing in youth, and your hearts are cheering you in the days of your youth, you are apt not to be mindful upon what slippery places you stand. You look forward, and number years to come, as if they were your own. You flatter yourselves that death is at a great distance: but remember, young and healthful as you are, that your life is frail as the grass, or as the flower of the field. The young, we see, may die. This has just been witnessed by sad experience. An affecting image of death has now been presented before your eyes. You have been following to the grave your young acquaintance. Lately she was as likely to live as any of you. The sprightliness, and joy of youth and health, bloomed in her face: but death, laying his hand upon her, changed her countenance, and sent her away. *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth.* What an affecting lesson is this. See that you do not forget it, nor neglect to improve it. And if you turn your eyes to yonder burying ground, where you just now left the mortal part of your

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youthful friend and companion, how many bodies of youths may you find lying there, who a few weeks, or perhaps but a few days before they died, had the same flattering prospects of living, and the same vigor which you now have. And it may be that death is now very near to some of you. It may be that the death warrant from the court of heaven, is now making out against the youth in that pew, or in that seat. Boast not yourselves of tomorrow. Make no dependence upon the frail uncertain thing called life. To day hear the voice of God and harden not your hearts. And whenever hereafter you may be rejoicing in your youth, and enjoying the innocent amusements that are suitable to your age, forget not that you must die: and as dying, accountable creatures. Remember your Creator, and fear and serve Him.

Fourthly, and to conclude. SINCE life is so frail, let us all be diligent in making a due preparation for death. What an affecting voice as it were, have we this day heard, saying to every one of us, *Be ye also ready.* May the solemn impression, which it has occasioned, have an abiding influence on our minds. Business of infinite weight is before us. This is a state of trial and discipline. Means are used in and by the gospel, to train us up for immortal glory and felicity. Things of solemn and unspeakable importance, depend on the improvement of this short life. Opportunities that are past, cannot be recovered. Future opportunities of grace and salvation cannot be depended on. Now is the

the accepted time : neglect not to improve it. Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, for your own souls, or for others, do it with all your might ; for *There is no work, or device, or knowledge in the grave, whither we go.* Let us fill up our time as becomes creatures, who expect to die, and give an account of our stewardship. Exercising repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, let us be watchful and circumspect, and be instant in prayer ; daily commending these frail bodies and our immortal souls, to the care and keeping of the God of all grace : and see that we set our affections on things above. Blessed be the Father of mercy, that there is a hope set before us ; the joyful hope of a resurrection and immortal felicity. Blessed be His name, that the way and means of obtaining eternal life, are plainly pointed out in the gospel of His Son : and, that though we are sinners, lost and undone, we are freely invited to turn unto Him, and live. And now may His grace be sufficient for us ; that by repentance and faith unfeigned, and new obedience, we may work out our own salvation : that we may love God and our dear Redeemer, and faithfully submit ourselves to Their service and discipline : aiming constantly at the divine approbation, and to bring forth much fruit, to the glory of our heavenly Father. In life and in death, may we glorify Him ; and may He be the health of our countenance, and our GOD.

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